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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000752

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS AND DRL/AWH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/23/2017

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL VM

SUBJECT: POLICE INTERFERENCE AGAIN MARS AMBASSADOR'S
MEETING WITH ACTIVISTS' FAMILIES; GVN CONTINUES CRACKDOWN

REF: A. HANOI 636

- 1B. HANOI 720
- 1C. HANOI 737
- 1D. HANOI 681 AND PREVIOUS

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Classified By: Michael W. Marine, Ambassador. Reasons: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

11. (C) The Government of Vietnam's (GVN) crackdown on political dissent continues. On April 23, the Ambassador's second attempt at hosting an event at his residence with family members of political dissidents was blocked by the police. Four of the five invitees were either prevented from leaving their homes or detained in local police stations to stop them from traveling to the residence. The only one who made it was Bui Kim Ngan, wife of imprisoned journalist Nguyen Vu Binh. Meeting with the Ambassador, Mrs. Ngan said that she is extremely concerned about her husband's deteriorating health. She has no information on a possible amnesty and is concerned about her husband's possible future life as a "house arrestee." Based on Post's direct and indirect contact with the five invitees, all are currently safe and free as of April 24.

12. (C) Media reports indicate that a May 11 trial date has been set for detained human rights lawyers Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan, and Post (in addition to other Hanoi-based diplomatic missions) is seeking permission to send an observer. Finally, another Hanoi-based activist, Tran Khai Thanh Thuy, has been arrested and charged with "conducting propaganda activities against the State." End Summary.

Activists' Family Members Once Again Blocked

13. (C) In an attempt to reconstitute the April 5 tea that was blocked by police interference (Ref A), the Ambassador reinvited the following five women, family members of political dissidents, to his residence on April 23:

-- 1) Mrs. Vu Thuy Ha (wife of Pham Hong Son, cyber-dissident who translated "What is Democracy?" into Vietnamese, now under house arrest);

-- 2) Mrs. Bui Kim Ngan (wife of jailed political dissident Nguyen Vu Binh, imprisoned since 2002);

-- 3) Mrs. Nguyen Thi Thu Hien (wife of attorney and recent NED Reagan-Fascell Fellow Le Quoc Quan);

-- 4) Mrs. Vu Minh Khanh (wife of jailed human rights lawyer Nguyen Van Dai); and,

-- 5) Mrs. Tran Thi Le (mother of jailed human rights lawyer Le Thi Cong Nhan).

¶4. (C) In a virtual repeat of the events of April 5, Ministry of Public Security (MPS) officials took steps to prevent four of the five invitees from attending: Mrs. Le and Mrs. Hien were summoned for, and attended, 8:00 a.m.-to-8:00 p.m. "discussion sessions" at their local police stations; Mrs. Khanh received a similar request from the police, but refused to go and locked herself inside her house; and, Mrs. Ha made it as far as the Ambassador's neighborhood, but was then arrested on the street and reportedly "beaten" and detained by police officers (according to her husband Pham Hong Son) until after 8:00 p.m. Only Mrs. Ngan made it to the Ambassador's residence and was able to be escorted inside by Poloffs, despite the menacing presence of five to ten plainclothes police.

Nguyen Vu Binh's Health Deteriorating

¶5. (C) Ngan said that she last saw her husband in prison on April 1. He is "very sick," and she is extremely worried about his health. Binh has occasional chest pain, difficulty breathing, high blood pressure, bad headaches and digestive disorders. Prison officials took him late last year to a provincial hospital, where he was diagnosed with "fatty liver disease," but it was a "superficial examination," according to Ngan, and they were not able to run the blood and urine tests that her husband had requested.

¶6. (C) Ngan has not talked to her husband about his possible

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release because "it is forbidden," she said. (Note: Senior GVN officials have said since November 2006 that Binh will be released "on the occasion of the next amnesty;" based on a recent National Assembly decision, this could be in July -- Ref B. End Note.) Ngan expressed concern about her husband's post-prison "house arrestee" existence, noting that Pham Hong Son is "not even allowed to take his kids to school." House arrestees are typically harassed and locked down before any international events, she said, such as during the APEC Summit; "the stress of this kind of life would be great," she predicted. As a result of their father's imprisonment, Binh's daughters are "more reserved" than other children, Ngan said. The Ambassador and Ngan agreed to stay in contact through the Political Section.

Possible Trial Date for Lawyers Dai and Nhan

¶7. (C) Media reports indicate that a May 11 trial date has been set for jailed human rights lawyers Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan. (Note: We are seeking confirmation of this, as well as permission to send an observer to the trial; several other Hanoi-based diplomatic missions are doing the same. End Note.) According to MFA Spokesman Le Dzung, in response to a reporter's question on the subject, "the decision about whether to allow outside observers is up to the court in question." Lawyer Dai's wife Khanh told Poloff April 24 that the MPS Investigations Office ended the investigation phase of the case and that it had forwarded its final report to the Supreme People's Procuracy (the prosecutor's office). Khanh has been trying to reach the Procuracy to request that Dai's defense attorney be given access to both Dai and the GVN's case against him. She was told that the officer in charge of the case is "on a business trip" until next week, Khanh reported.

Another Dissident Arrest

¶8. (C) Tran Khai Thanh Thuy, a "cyber-dissident" under house arrest in Hanoi since November 2006, was arrested on April 21 by the MPS Investigations Unit. Thuy, an internet journalist and blogger with multiple pseudonyms, has been charged with violating Article 88 of the Criminal Code ("conducting propaganda activities against the State"). Thuy's husband told us on April 23 that MPS searched their home and confiscated Thuy's computer and all of her writings.

Comment

¶9. (C) As on the previous occasion, in advance of the event, Post provided GVN authorities, including MPS officials, with notice of the Ambassador's intention to hold this event (Ref C). Security officials' decision to act to block the event was premeditated and systematic. In acting in this manner, the GVN decided again to challenge the Ambassador's right to invite ordinary Vietnamese, under no legal sanction themselves, to his residence. The Ambassador sent a letter to VFM Le Van Bang on April 24 strongly protesting the GVN action (text transmitted septel). News of the government's actions is being reported on U.S. ethnic Vietnamese websites.

We have fortunately been able to ascertain that all five guests are safe and free (including Pham Hong Son's wife, who was released around 8:00 p.m., supposedly with scrapes and bruises from her run-in with the police). As noted in Ref. D, we will continue to stay in touch with these and other family members of detained and imprisoned activists, urge our diplomatic colleagues to deepen their interest in and concern about the human rights situation here and raise with our GVN and Party interlocutors at every opportunity negative consequences of its actions and this ongoing crackdown. End Comment.

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